



**Connecticut Farm Bureau Association**

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February 21, 2013

**Testimony on: HB 6350 AN ACT CONCERNING THE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM ENDING JUNE 30, 2015, AND OTHER PROVISIONS RELATING TO REVENUE.**

**and in opposition to HB 6357 AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION.**

Submitted by: Henry N. Talmage, Executive Director, Connecticut Farm Bureau Association

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*The following testimony is submitted on behalf of the Connecticut Farm Bureau, a statewide nonprofit membership organization of over 5,000 families dedicated to farming and the future of Connecticut agriculture.*

**Senator Harp, Representative Walker members of the Committee,**

**The Connecticut Farm Bureau is disappointed that the Governor's budget proposal did not increase the funding to the Agriscience and Technology program.**

This important and proven program educates the next generation of agricultural leaders at the 19 Agriscience and Technology centers across the state. The Governor's Council on Agricultural Development has been conducting in-depth interviews with key agricultural leaders over the past year. We learned that the agricultural industry is struggling to find enough qualified candidates for middle and upper management positions. The Agriscience and Technology program is doing a good job of training young people interested in pursuing agricultural careers, but we can do more. Despite the investment by the state of \$200,000,000 in facilities, most centers are only operating at 2/3 capacity. This is not because of a lack of qualified applicants (hundreds of qualified applicants are turned away each year) but instead because of a lack of per-pupil funding available to local school districts by the state. In contrast, the other choice school programs such as Vo-tech and Charter and Magnet schools all have a much higher level of per-student state support. We have the facilities, we have qualified and motivated applicants, we have the track record of academic and career success and we have jobs that need to be filled.

The ECS Task Force in their final recommendations proposed a four -year phase-in of increases to the state support of the Agriscience and Technology program to bring it inline with the other choice programs and allow for full utilization of the infrastructure and student demand for this program. The Connecticut Farm Bureau supports this investment in our future workforce so we can continue to grow Connecticut's agricultural economy for the future.

**The Connecticut Farm Bureau opposes the provision contained in HB 6357, AN ACT IMPLEMENTING THE BUDGET RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE GOVERNOR CONCERNING EDUCATION that would transfer funding for the Healthy Foods Initiative of the Department of Education from the General Fund to the Community Investment Act fund.**

The Community Investment Act provides funding for the Agricultural Sustainability Account, Agricultural Viability Grant Program, Farm Transition Program, CT Grown program, Farm Link program, Seafood Advisory Council, CT Farm Wine Development Council, the Food Policy Council and the Farmland Preservation Program..

The Healthy Food Initiative is a worthwhile project that has been instrumental in improving the quality of foods served in our schools by providing a Healthy Food Certification Program and 10 cents per meal reimbursement for participating schools that serve healthier foods. CT Farm Bureau is in full support of the program and we in no way advocate for its elimination. However, we strongly object to utilizing the Community Investment Act (CIA) as the source of funding for the program.

In 2005 a coalition of groups representing agriculture, open space, historic preservation and affordable housing worked with the Legislature to pass the Community Investment Act. Right from the beginning it was recognized that the Community Investment

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Act was an innovative way to provide funding for land-based and real estate related projects that was tied to activity to the real estate market itself. The funding that has been generated through the recording fees authorized through the Community Investment Act has provided a means to protect and promote each of these critical areas of importance for the residents of Connecticut in a very efficient and logical manner.

To permanently divert \$4,000,000 per year to fund the Healthy Food Initiative of the approximately \$21,000,000 that the CIA brings in annually will have a profound negative effect on the ability to continue the great work of the Community Investment Act. It is extremely important not to allow the Community Investment Act to become a source of funding for programs and projects unrelated to it's original intent. If this is allowed to happen CIA will simply become a mechanism to shift costs away from the general fund.

The Connecticut Farm Bureau urges the Committee to recommend the Healthy Foods Initiative funding be removed from the Community Investment Act and restored to the General Fund.